

Prebendary Richard de Thormerton

In our 14th century prebend, we find Richard de Thormerton. There had been great prebendaries, like Henry de Bracton, who lived and worked among us. For Thormerton, though, Whitchurch Prebend was just part of his income and we know of him mainly through *Hemingby's Register*, the chronicle of Salisbury Cathedral.

Richard was a distinguished ecclesiastical lawyer who was King's Proctor (law officer intervening in suspect probate or divorce cases), special envoy to the Papal Court and clerk to the royal household.

In 1320, he was clerk of the Worcester diocese, becoming a canon in 1332. In 1336, he was a canon of Exeter and, in that year, the Bishop of Winchester gave him the living of Bishopstone Rectory. Not satisfied with this, on 1 June 1342, he petitioned Pope Clement VI for an "expectation" (a promise) of a prebend at Wells (when one fell vacant).

His misfortune was to live at a time when Popes and Kings fought over the right to appoint prebendaries. Worse still, there were benefice-hunters around and Richard was one of their victims.

In 1343, before his time here, the Bishop of Salisbury presented Richard with Horton Prebend, something of a poison chalice as it turned out by virtue of its complex legal situation.

In 1346, the King granted the same Horton Prebend to William de Farleigh, a Clerk of the King's Wardrobe. However, in the intervening years, Richard had obtained letters from the Pope to secure his title to Horton. Despite these, Farleigh pressed his case and issued a writ.

Farleigh's case was that prebends vacant at the deaths of bishops were in the King's gift to bestow. Horton Prebend was allegedly vacant at the death of the Bishop of Salisbury, Simon of Ghent. The case, of course, was complex, long and tortuous with both sides presenting many ancient writs in evidence. In the end, the court referred the point at issue to a jury, which found – as they always did – for the King.

Farleigh, then, got Horton Prebend even if on pretexts that were questionable at best. For Thormerton, 1347 was a bad year; he was out on his ear or, in ecclesiastical parlance, extruded.

If to modern eyes this seems corrupt, it was common practice then!

Still, he clung on to Whitchurch Prebend until 1361, the year in which he died.